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ABSTRACT

A rationale is established for designing a self-concept instrument for minority children which differs from traditional self-concept instruments. The paper describes a battery of instruments designed by the investigator, which tests, after three other variables of self-concept, a fourth variable, "sense of control". This seems to be an important variable for culturally different children, but comprehensive batteries for monitoring student's self-perceptions seldom include such a variable. The battery of multidimensional self-concept instruments consists of a self-report questionnaire with a value component, as well as a teacher evaluation questionnaire. (Author)

THE INADEQUACY OF TRADITIONAL SELF-CONCEPT INSTRUMENTS FOR CULTURALLY DIFFERENT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Much of the research on culturally different children, done by both black and white social scientists prior to 1967, has shown that they tend to exhibit negative self-concepts (Goodman, 1946, 1952; Clark and Clark, 1940, 1952; Hartley, 1946; Trager and Yarrow, 1952; Morland, 1958, 1963; Deutsch, 1967; Witty, 1967; Havighurst and Moorefield, 1967; Tannenbaum, 1962). However, this investigator would agree with those researchers[1] whose data on inner-city Black and Mexican American students seems to indicate that culturally different children do not necessarily suffer from lower or negative self-concepts in spite of the hardships of ghetto life. Lack of agreement may well be attributed to the instruments used to measure self-concept.

Most of the existing instruments designed to accurately and validly measure the self-concepts of elementary school children were not designed specifically with culturally different children in mind, but were subsequently tested on them (Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory, 1959; Bledsoe's Self-Concept Scale, 1967; Bolea, Felker and Barnes' Pictorial Self-Concept Scale, 1967, and the Piers-Harris' Children's Self-Concept Scale, 1964). Since these instruments have not been designed to attend to the needs of culturally different children, often the

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[1]V.M. Kerensky, "Reported Self-Concept in Relation to Academic Achievement in an Inner-City Setting." Dissertation Abstracts, 27:2325-A; M.D. Caplin, information corresponding to that given for Kerensky; A.F. Soares and L.M. Soares, information corresponding to that given for Kerensky; J.M. Powers, information corresponding to that given for Kerensky; N.T. Trowbridge, information corresponding to that given for Kerensky.

elements sampled are irrelevant to the culturally different child's world. As an example, let us examine the Pictorial Self-Concept Scale, developed by Bolea, Felker and Barnes (1967) to be group administered to children, grade's K-4. This scale presents fifty cartoon-like picture cards of boys and girls in everyday activities, dressed in various costumes depicting how the child might see himself. The subject sorts the cards into three piles according to whether the figure designated by a star on his shirt is like him, sometimes like him, or not like him at all. If the subject is a boy, he might want to identify himself as Superboy; or if a girl as Cinderella. This scale might be meaningless to 8, 9, and 10 year-old black children who could not readily identify with Superboy and Cinderella. A black child might identify more readily with a basketball player or a soul singer, perhaps.

A test, when designed with a particular population in mind, should consider that population's values and concerns in order to generate more accurate measurement, thereby insuring that the content of the items of the test reflects the culture of the original test population. If the test is to be used with other populations whose culture differs from that of the original test population, the content of the items would have to change to reflect the values and concerns of that population. In order to change the content of the items to reflect different values and concerns of various culturally different groups of children and not change radically the test design, the items must be stated in a manner which allows for the substitution of different key words or phrases where necessary.

Another important reason for the inadequacy of existing self-concept instruments is their failure to measure "sense of control," a variable especially significant for culturally different children. History has shown that Black Americans, as well as other culturally different peoples, have had little or no sense of

control over their lives in this country. Some of the research differentiates between internal and external scores, in terms of locus of control. This research has indicated that Black and other culturally different peoples have higher external scores than white individuals (Battle and Rotter, 1963; Lefcourt and Ladwig, 1965a, 1966). In the report on "Equality of Educational Opportunity," Coleman and his associates (1966) observed that Black and other minority children (i.e., Indian Americans, Mexican-Americans) were more externally oriented than Whites. Although the research literature to date indicates that people who believe in external control are less effectively motivated and as a result achieve less, these same effects may not necessarily follow for those culturally different peoples who believe that economic or discriminatory factors are more important in explaining their success or failure than individual skill. Gurin and his associates (1969) believe that focusing on external forces instead of depressing motivation may be motivationally healthy. This dimension, sense of control, would presumably have a strong influence on the culturally different child's perceptions of himself and his world.

With these considerations in mind, a battery of self-concept instruments for culturally different elementary school children was designed and developed, using a definition of self-concept which takes into account the multi-dimensionality of this phenomenon in terms of four interdependent dimensions. These four dimensions which seem to the investigator to be most important to measure in determining the self-concepts of culturally different children are: self-esteem, sense of control, academic self-concept, and social self-concept. "Self-esteem" refers to how an individual evaluates himself and indicates the extent to which he believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy (Coopersmith, 1967). In Coopersmith's definition of self-esteem, the individual arrives at an evaluation of his own worthiness by examining his performance, capacities and

attributes in light of his own personal standards and values. Therefore, self-esteem is a "personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself" (Coopersmith, 1967, p. 5).

"Sense of control" refers to how much an individual accepts responsibility for his own actions or whether he attributes different amounts of power or control to various external agents, such as adults, luck, peers, the "system," or fate. If a child has little sense of control, he also necessarily has little sense of responsibility, since the two are interdependent. Without a sense of responsibility, the student cannot succeed in a system which demands adhering to schedules, deadlines and assignments. Ralph Tyler, in an article, "The Behavioral Sciences and the Schools," explained the importance of this variable as it relates to the child and the school experience.

> An important difference among people is the degree to which they see the environment as something out of their control and to which they must adjust, or as something which they can handle for their own purposes .... This view of self affects the approach the child makes to the school experience, that is, in seeing his role as active or passive (Tyler in Goodlad, ed., The Changing America School, 1966).

"Academic Self-concept" refers to how an individual evaluates his ability to function successfully in a school environment and since the focus here is on the elementary school child, this variable must be measured. It has been hypothesized and proven that a student's self-concept either limits or facilitates his academic performance (Davidson and Lang, 1960; Roth, 1959). Brookover (1959) incorporating theory from the symbolic interaction framework of social psychology and phenomenological field theory, explained how the self-concept affects academic performance:

(a) the student learns what he perceives he is able to learn; and

(b) significant others, particularly teachers, have important influences on the development of a student's self-concept. Influences are in the form of expectancies, which in turn affect the student's ability to perform in an academic setting. Influences are assimilated by a perceptual mechanism, the result of which is the looking-glass-self (Brookover, 1959, pp. 84-85).

The fourth variable is "social self-concept," which refers to how an individual thinks the people who are significant in his life (i.e., his parents, siblings, other relatives, teachers, classmates, friends, etc.) perceive him. This variable is very important since phenomenologists and social psychologists contend that one's perceptions of how others behave toward him is the basis for learning who he is. Unless he is acceptable to himself, he is not likely to behave in a manner which makes him acceptable to others. Coombs and Davies in Sociology and Social Research made the following observation:

> In the context of the school world, a student who is defined as a 'poor student' (by significant others and thereby self) comes to conceive of himself as such and gears his behavior accordingly, that is, the social expectation is realized. However, if he is led to believe by means of the social 'looking-glass' that he is capable and able to achieve well, he does (Coombs and Davies in Sociology and Social Research, 1966, 50, pp. 486-469).

For the culturally different child in American society, the looking-glass into which he gazes may reflect a sense of inferiority, because of his race; and a sense of powerlessness, because of his economic status. This reflection has an adverse effect on his self-esteeem, sense of control, academic self-concept, and social self-concept. Together, these four dimensions compose something more than the separate parts, for they each affect the other. Together, they are the culturally different child's comprehensive self-concept, as defined by the investigator. Therefore, a battery of instruments was designed to include those four dimensions.

For such a phenomenon as the self-concept, a single instrument would never really give a clear picture of how an individual perceives himself. Lazarsfeld emphasized the importance of examining behavior from a variety of different approaches when he contended that for any phenomenon one should have objective observations as well as introspective reports (1971, p. XIV).

Since the self-concept is such a difficult subject to deal with empirically, evidence based solely on subjective evaluations would be rendered ambiguous because of the possiblity of intervening defensive processes; whereas evidence acquired solely from the perspective of the observer overlooks a vital component, the perceptions of the individual being evaluated. When both approaches are used, the result is a series of types based upon the level of evaluation and the extent of agreement between the evaluations.

The battery of multi-dimensional self-concept instruments designed in this study consists of a self-report questionnaire, with a value component, as well as a teacher evaluation questionnaire. Each instrument helps to clarify the investigator's perceptions of the child's view of himself, thereby greatly enhancing the credibility or validity of the research results (Pelto, 1970, p. 145). The battery of instruments can be used with any group of culturally different children in grades three through six, providing that appropriate changes in item content are made to reflect the culturally different population being evaluated.

The first instrument, the "Affective Self-Report (AS-R) Questionnaire," which is to be group administered, consists of forty-seven items requiring the student to circle "yes" if he feels the statement truthfully describes him, or "no" if the statement doesn't truthfully describe him. A self-report instrument was designed because it offers certain advantages. First, it can be readily

normed or standardized, and test scores can be readily treated statistically and correlated with other variables. Secondly, self-report instruments contain a considerable number of items which may give a more reliable indication of the concept than a few random questions in an interview. Another advantage which can be considered when choosing a self-report technique over another technique is that the individual may be more objective and truthful than when interviewed or asked to write an autobiography (Vernon, 1963, p. 266). The maximum possible score on the AS-R Questionnaire, representing the highest overall self-concept, is forty-seven. However, the highest possible score on each dimension is what is really important. Therefore, the forty-seven scored items are subdivided into a total of four sub-scales: (1) self-esteem (13 items); (2) sense of control (12 items); (3) academic self-concept (9 items), and (4) social self-concept (13 items).

A "Value Questionnaire" accompanies the self-report instrument in order to determine the degree of importance that the culturally different child expresses in regard to the dimensions of self being evaluated. The Value Questionnaire is based on the statements found in the self-report instrument, however, the questions are general in that they don't focus directly on the individual. As in most assessment techniques, the meaning of the question is placed outside of the individual in order to attempt to tap what he truly values. The student is asked to respond to each question according to how important the activity in question is to him. He is to circle either a response of "very important," "a little important," or "not important at all." The value component is essential in the process of assessing the self-concept of children whose culture differs from that of the dominant culture in America, for each culturally different group of people have different values and one cannot necessarily expect that they would coincide with those held by the dominant white society of this country. For

example, most Indian children are taught to be seen but not heard when adults are present. This training affects the child's behavior in the classroom, preventing him from responding easily when asked to answer a question. "Many teachers regard such behavior as sullen, but more often than not the child is really quite shy and exhibiting the cultural trait he has learned at home" (Misiaszek in Banks and Joyce, 1971, p. 53).

Combs and Snygg, in considering the importance of values in understanding an individual's perceptions and behavior, made the following observations:

> Goals and values are important factors to be explored in assessing people's meanings. With a knowledge of the goals and values important to a subject, we are in a position to make much more accurate inferences regarding the ways in which he is likely to perceive a given event.... Knowing the existence of such goals and values in a personality helps us to make far more accurate inferences as to the meanings governing his behavior and consequently to predict what he will do in many situations (1959, p. 449).

The Value Questionnaire designed in this study, consists of forty-six items. Answers to these questions give a better insight into not only the child's perception of self, but also his behavior which reflects his self. With this assessment of the importance of various behaviors and activities will come a clearer meaning to his yes or no response on the Affective Self-Report Questionnaire. Furthermore, the child's responses on the Value Questionnaire will help to clarify any differences between his evaluation on the self-report instrument and the teacher's evaluation of his self-concept.

Since the self-report questionnaire limits the choices that the student has in describing himself, it cannot be used alone to give a valid picture of the child and his world. McCandless (1967) contends that the closest approximation that can be made to knowing the "real" self is to compare the statements of a

person about himself with judgments of people who know him well. In order to see how the student is perceived by someone with whom he interacts frequently, a "Teacher-Questionnaire concerning the Student's Self-Concept" (Teacher-Questionnaire) was designed. The teacher is asked to evaluate observable student behaviors, presumably related to each aspect of self-concept, according to specifically defined rates of behavior. The teacher is also asked to evaluate the student on the four dimensions of self-concept, based on definitions given along a specified range for each variable. There are twenty-two items in this instrument.

Development Procedures

The development of the three instruments was spread over a nine-month period, beginning in the fall, 1972, and continuing through the spring, 1973, with each instrument receiving major and minor revisions. In constructing the Affective Self-Report Questionnaire, certain criteria were adhered to: (1) The items reflecting each dimension were based on self-concept theory, as well as on the theories of self-esteem (Coopersmith), sense of control (Crandall and Rotter), academic self-concept (Brookover), and social self-concept (Mead, Sullivan and Cooley); (2) the words and phrases included were to reflect those commonly used in describing how people feel and were to be easy enough for children in the eight to twelve year old age range to read and understand; (3) there should be approximately an equal number of positive and negative statements on feelings; (4) the content of the items should reflect as closely as possible the general values of the original test population, i.e., items on art or athletics might be more closely associated with the self-concepts of certain minorities; likewise, significant others might include members of an extended family rather than a nuclear family.

The construction of the Value Questionnaire which accompanies the self-report questionnaire, was based on three premises. First, the items would reflect

only those found in the self-report questionnaire, in order to see whether the self-report actually attempts to tap experiences that are valued by this particular population of culturally different children. Second, the items would not focus directly on the individual, but would be more general. Third, the questionnaire would involve one of three possible responses according to the importance of the activity being described; using the alternatives--very important, a little important, and not important at all.

The Teacher Questionnaire concerning the Student's Self-Concept evolved from an observation checklist to a teacher rating scale. There were also specific criteria used in designing this instrument: (1) The behaviors to be rated were selected after several observations of third graders' behavior in and out of the classroom, and after repeated conversations with third grade teachers in an inner-city school, as well as conversations with a psychologist; (2) the behaviors were to be indicative of only three of the four dimensions of self-concept being examined. Teachers were not asked to rate the behaviors of students along the dimension, social self-concept, based on the assumption that they would not be able to observe how the student perceived significant others evaluations of him; (3) the positive and negative behaviors chosen to reflect the three dimensions of self were also based on the theories of self-esteem, sense of control and academic self-concept, as well as references from Spaulding's "Categories for a Coping Analysis Schedule for Educational Settings," from Simon and Boyer's Mirrors for Behavior, 1968. (4) The teacher questionnaire would be composed of two sections: one, where the teacher rates perceived behaviors; the other, where the teacher rates the student generally on each of the four dimensions of self-concept. With these criteria in mind, the instrument was designed. In Section I, the teacher is asked to rate each child on an eighteen item, five-point numerical scale on behaviors presumed to be

related to self-esteem, sense of control, and academic self-concept. Some of the items included in this section refer to such behaviors as the child's participation in class activities, his reactions to failure and success, and his need for encouragement. In Section II of the questionnaire, the teacher is asked to evaluate the student on the four dimensions of self-concept, based on definitions given along a five-point numerical scale, ranging from very high to very low.

These then are the three instruments which make up the battery of multidimensional self-concept instruments: the Affective Self-Report (AS-R) Questionnaire, with its accompanying Value Questionnaire and the Teacher Questionnaire concerning the Students' Self-Concept (Teacher Questionnaire). Together they serve, in their present form, as a diagnostic tool to acquire baseline data on how one particular population of culturally different elementary school children view themselves and the attitudes and values they express towards school and other related activities which may affect their self-concepts. It is expected that with changes in item content, these instruments will be useful for this purpose with any culturally different population, including small rural pockets of Amish children or urban ethnic minorities of Puerto-Ricans, Mexican-Americans or American Indians, as well as the Black inner-city population on which the instruments were tested.

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